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# On the Coloniality of “New” Mega-Infrastructure Projects in East Africa

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**Abstract:** This article responds to a preference for short-term history in research on the infrastructure turn by engaging with the *longue durée* of East Africa’s latest infrastructure scramble. It traces the history of LAPSET in Kenya and the Central Corridor in Tanzania, revealing the coloniality of new and improved transport infrastructure along both corridors. This exercise demonstrates how the spatial visions and territorial plans of colonial administrators get built in to new infrastructure and materialise in ways that serve the interests of global capital rather than peasant and indigenous peoples being promised more modern, prosperous futures. The article concludes by suggesting that a focus on the *longue durée* also reveals uneven patterns of mobility and immobility set in motion during the colonial scramble for Africa and reinforced after independence. These “colonial moorings” are significant as they shape political reactions to new mega-infrastructure projects today and constrain the emancipatory potential of infrastructure-led development.

**Keywords:** infrastructure, infrastructure-led development, territorial design, coloniality, LAPSET, Central Corridor

## Introduction

Within its “sphere of influence” the railway has made most things possible in East Africa ... Directly or indirectly, the railway has influenced all the controversies which have arisen from the British occupation of East Africa. (M.F. Hill, Njoro, 25 February 1949)

Many of East Africa’s railway lines were constructed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when European powers were embroiled in a “scramble for Africa”. The desire for imperial dominance motivated colonial governments to commit scarce resources to ambitious infrastructure projects, as they aimed to connect inaccessible parts of seized territories to key administrative centres and ports. Today, many colonial railway lines are being replaced, modernised, and expanded. New investments in infrastructure are making possible routes and modes of connectivity that were initially imagined and planned when East Africa was under German and

British rule. This begs the question: If railways made possible the colonisation of East Africa, as M.F. Hill suggests above, is it possible for the latest infrastructure scramble in the region to have emancipatory potential?

In this article, we question the extent to which the newest wave of transport infrastructure sweeping across East Africa is reproducing colonial legacies. We do so by reflecting on the histories of two mega-infrastructure corridors currently under development: the Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) Corridor in Kenya and the Central Corridor in Tanzania. We find that tracing and understanding the histories of these two corridors reveals the coloniality of new mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, we show how the spatial visions and territorial plans of colonial administrators are reappearing in visions and plans for these new mega-infrastructure corridors today. We argue that, although the material infrastructure that comprises these corridors might be new, the promises of enhanced connectivity and motivations behind connectivity are anything but new. East Africa's new mega-infrastructure projects carry ambitions from the colonial past into the present under the guise of a modern, prosperous future.

Our insights into the coloniality of East Africa's new mega-infrastructure projects also raise questions about what the region's unfolding infrastructure scramble means for indigenous peoples and peasants living along each corridor. A comparative analysis of LAPSSET and the Central Corridor reveals how enduring legacies of colonial planning and spatial visioning continue to shape how people experience and respond to infrastructure development. Moreover, varied political reactions to mega-infrastructure projects in different contexts can be partly attributed to different memories of empire-building during the colonial era and state-building after independence. In this sense, a focus on the *longue durée* reveals the constrained emancipatory potential of infrastructure and offers contextual insights into the different reactions people have to new mega-infrastructure projects.

Our analysis is informed by documentation on infrastructure development in Kenya and Tanzania. Archival research was carried out in the Kenyan National Archives, which contain historical documents on transport infrastructure in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial East Africa. Recent documents on both countries' infrastructure agendas were gathered through online searches and visits to relevant government offices. Our analysis is further supported by four months of field research carried out with civil society researchers along LAPSSET and the Central Corridor between July 2017 and August 2018. This fieldwork involved observational research as well as focus group discussions with 167 participants living along each corridor. A further 43 semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants with responsibilities to people living along each corridor, including representatives of civil society, non-governmental organisations, and various levels of government. Media sources were also gathered and analysed to further triangulate our findings.

This article begins with an overview of recent literature on infrastructure-led development and territorial transformation in the global South. This section highlights the importance of focusing on the *longue durée* of infrastructure-led development. In subsequent sections, we discuss the cases of LAPSSET and the Central

Corridor—drawing attention to (dis)continuities between infrastructure development in the colonial, post-independence, and contemporary era. Before concluding, we discuss how continuities between infrastructure projects of the past and present shape people’s everyday experiences with infrastructure and translate into different political reactions to new mega-infrastructure projects today.

## The (Re)Turn to Infrastructure-Led Development

Investment in infrastructure has reached record levels across much of the global South. As development banks and governments unveil ambitious plans for infrastructure development, investors have come to see these plans as lucrative investment opportunities. Nowhere is the “global infrastructure turn” (Dodson 2017) more obvious than in Africa, where regional mega-infrastructure projects have come to dominate national and global development policy agendas. Several new multi-donor platforms, such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa spearheaded by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, have been established to promote opportunities for regional infrastructure investment. This surge of interest in infrastructure investment reflects a growing consensus within mainstream development circles that infrastructure is fundamental to achieving development.

Infrastructure-led development aspires to address uneven development by (re)spatialising and (re)designing territories through mega-infrastructure projects—creating channels of connectivity that facilitate the circulation of goods, materials, and information smoothly and evenly across space. While connectivity through large-scale infrastructure investments can be realised in various ways, there is a growing trend of directing investment towards infrastructure corridors. Corridors are vast networks of roads, railways, pipelines, and ports, among other transport infrastructure, built to connect sites of commodity production to urban centres and global markets. These bundles of infrastructure produce transnationally networked territories that speed up the circulation of commodities (Chua et al. 2018; Kanai and Schindler 2019a).

Recent research on Africa’s latest “infrastructure scramble” (Kanai and Schindler 2019a) attempts to explain the logic and timing of the continent’s infrastructure turn. Some explanations link growing demand for infrastructure to the rise of a consumer middle class while others see the expansion of infrastructure as a “fix” for resolving spatial constraints that threaten conditions of capitalist production (Dodson 2017). Others still attribute the rapid expansion of transport infrastructure to the proliferation of national spatial planning initiatives (Schindler et al. 2018). Governments across Africa are reinvigorating national development plans that emphasise a need for spatial planning and balanced regional growth. Simultaneously, development banks are promoting spatial planning as an antidote to both market and state failure (Kanai and Schindler 2019a). From this perspective, Africa’s infrastructure turn is linked to a growing number of national development plans that identify spatial disparities as *the* problem hindering development and balanced, well-connected spatial economies as *the* solution to underdevelopment.

One debate within this literature is if this trend represents a turn or return to infrastructure-led development. There seems to be a growing consensus that African states are returning to a previous “age of state-driven territorial design and infrastructure enabled connectivity” rather than implementing an altogether new approach to development (Schindler et al. 2018:346). Much like the 1970s and 1980s—when newly independent countries adopted national development strategies that prioritised spatial planning and balanced regional growth—today’s national development planning schemes emphasise the same priorities (Kanai and Schindler 2019a:346; Kanai and Schindler 2019b).

In the following discussion, we contribute to this debate by tracing the spatial visions and territorial logics embedded in East Africa’s current moment of infrastructure development further back in time. Recognising that there is an instinctive preference to engage in short-term history (Braudel 2009), much is to be gained by focusing on the *longue durée* of territorial transformation through infrastructure development. As such, we use LAPSSET and the Central Corridor to illustrate how the spatial visions and territorial logics of colonial administrators are reappearing in the discourses, documents, and visions surrounding these corridors today. An expanded historical lens also helps reveal how the reactions of people subjected to new infrastructure projects are underpinned by collective memories of colonisation and state-building processes in the post-independence era.

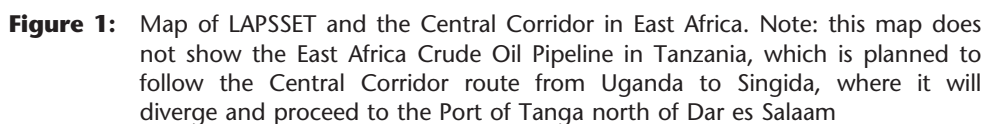
## National Development through Infrastructure in Northern Kenya

### *Present-Day Infrastructure-Led Development*

Kenya’s national development plan, called *Vision 2030*, aims to transform Kenya into a “newly-industrialising, middle-income country” by the year 2030. *Vision 2030* is being implemented through a series of successive five-year plans, each of which identifies and works towards the completion of flagship projects. Kenya has added new airports, railways, roads, ports, and power plants to its infrastructure networks over the past decade as part of this vision. This infrastructure is said to serve the broader goals of Kenya’s *Vision 2030* in two ways. First, it is promised to boost transnational connectivity and expand transnational trade and, second, it is promised to address regional socio-economic imbalances by integrating disconnected parts of the country into the national economy and infrastructure systems.

LAPSSET (Figure 1) plays a central role in the achievement of Kenya’s national development and spatial plans. Described by the Kenyan government as the “backbone for opening up Northern Kenya and integrating it into the national economy” (GoK 2012:6), LAPSET represents the “resurgent regional development regime” in action (Schindler et al. 2018). Through this 2000 km long transport corridor, the government aims to create a “seamless” and “connected” Africa (LCDA 2016). The government intends to use LAPSET to transform northern Kenya into a “nationally and transnationally networked functional territory” that is accessible to global networks of production and trade (Kanai and Schindler 2019b).

LAPSSET is comprised of two interconnected components: A 500 meter wide transport infrastructure corridor overlaid by a 50 kilometre wide economic



corridor for industrial investment (LCDA 2016). The transport corridor includes networks of highways, railway lines, oil pipelines, electrical power lines, and fibre-optic cables. From its coastal starting point, LAPSET traverses nine counties



across northern Kenya—all of which have been historically disconnected from the rest of the country. The government claims that the transport corridor will correct the region's history of socio-economic marginalisation and also position northern Kenya as a central logistics and transport hub.

In LAPSET's wider economic corridor, various development zones have been planned, including resort cities, special economic zones, export processing zones, and agricultural growth zones. The economic corridor serves two primary functions. First, investment in the economic corridor is meant to facilitate movement and logistics along the transport corridor. Plans for the economic corridor include container storage centres, an oil refinery, a shipbuilding and repair facility, and multiple airports. It is anticipated that, once complete, these facilities will enable the efficient movement of commodities, capital, and people across northern Kenya. Second, the economic corridor is meant to support the growth of existing and establishment of new value added industries. Key economic zones have been identified along the corridor based on the perceived potential of the arid, northern landscape. Livestock production and processing, tourism, and urban development are perceived as the most promising industries for investment (Interview, Isiolo, July 2017).

To date, around 60,000 hectares have been earmarked for a livestock production and processing zone in Isiolo County in north-central Kenya. Once complete, this zone will include a large quarantine area for livestock and a modern abattoir (LCDA 2017). There is also talk of developing a tanning industry in Isiolo County (Interview, Isiolo, July 2017). The livestock production and processing zone will be built according to international export market requirements set by Middle Eastern countries, as the region has expressed interest in importing more livestock products from Kenya. Isiolo was identified as a rational location for this production and processing zone, as livestock from South Sudan and Ethiopia already pass through the county on their way to the Kenyan coast.

A second value added industry planned for the economic corridor in northern Kenya is tourism. The economic corridor will eventually include three tourist zones, each of which will host a "resort city". These tourist zones will form a new tourism circuit, where tour groups can make use of LAPSET to experience three different world-renowned sites in Kenya (LCDA 2017:7). It is anticipated that northern Kenya's "rich biodiversity" and "rare and endangered wildlife species" will attract tourists to these strategically placed resort cities along the corridor (GoK 2013; LCDA 2017). Each of the resort cities will have close links with protected conservation areas. For example, tourists visiting Isiolo Resort City will be encouraged to travel by road to nearby national parks or reserves, such as Marsabit and Samburu, and private or community conservancies, such as Lewa or Il Ng'wesi.

A further intended by-product of LAPSET is urbanisation, particularly "in the northern parts of the country which were hitherto least urbanised" (GoK 2015:111). The resort cities are expected to transform low density areas into tourist towns with a "substantial population" (LCDA 2017). Some northern towns, such as Isiolo, have been selected to form a special cluster of "gateway towns", which will serve as key transport hubs along LAPSET. Other northern towns, such as Moyale, have been selected as part of a cluster of "border towns", which are

predicted to grow with improved regional integration. The government promises that these urban centres will provide commercial and employment opportunities for rural populations, as well as "enhance regional security" and "stabilise security in previously isolated unstable communities" (LCDA nd).

Ultimately, although a primary function of LAPSET is to enhance transnational trade and logistics, the corridor is also justified as a way to resolve existing disparities between northern Kenya and the rest of the country (GoK 2015). In this way, *Vision 2030* is often framed as a departure from Kenya's earlier approaches to national development and spatial planning. As Mosley and Watson (2016:453) explain, Kenya's northern "frontier regions were formerly seen as unproductive and of little interest; now they are seen as the site of unexploited resources that could provide the engine of growth for the wider national economy". Flagship projects like LAPSET are being used to incorporate northern Kenya "fully into the state as never before" (Mosley and Watson 2016:453). Such ideas are embodied by the general public: It is common to hear people in the region make comments like, "Because of LAPSET, Isiolo is now becoming the most important town in the country" (Interview, Isiolo, July 2017), or "Through LAPSET, we are becoming part of Kenya for the first time" (Interview, Isiolo, July 2018).

## ***Colonial Era Infrastructure-Led Development***

Historicising LAPSET reveals that the imperative of enhancing transnational connectivity throughout northern Kenya while securing its "underexploited" economic potential is reminiscent of colonial logics and modes of planning. LAPSET runs through what was known as the Northern Frontier District (NFD) under the East African Protectorate (or "British East Africa"). The East African Protectorate established the NFD in 1909 with administrative posts at Meru, Marsabit, Fort Harrington (Moyale), and, later, Archer's Post. At the time, the British presence in the NFD aimed to protect Kenya's borders with Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and Somalia (Oba 2013; Waweru 2001). This was achieved by restricting movement into and within the NFD. The NFD was "conceived primarily as a buffer zone between the fertile white highlands of Kenya, and the rival imperial powers of Ethiopia and Italy to the north and east" (Whittaker 2017:386). During the years immediately after the NFD was established, expenditures in the district beyond "law and order" were seen as an unnecessary drain on the empire's budget.

However, the colonial administration's ideas about how best to impose and maintain order in the NFD evolved over time. In 1911, the colonial administration decided to "consolidate" rule over the NFD (Oba 2013). In the annual report on the East Africa Protectorate for the year 1911–1912, the Governor states:

... it has been decided to adopt a more vigorous policy in the administration of the tribes inhabiting the Northern Frontier District and Jubaland. Hitherto the Government stations have been posts of observation only ... It is now felt, however, that in order to ensure the proper advancement of these scattered tribes the Government must openly assume the administration of their territories. (East Africa Protectorate 1912:55)



This “more vigorous” administration policy involved appointing and stationing additional police forces to administer so-called “scattered tribes” across northern Kenya—“to travel among them, to assist them in their desire to trade, and generally to gain their confidence” (East Africa Protectorate 1912:55). A force of armed, mounted guards was also established to assertively preserve peace across the NFD.

New security measures were accompanied by an interest in better integrating the NFD into the East Africa Protectorate for both economic and political purposes. The colonial administration proposed that a more efficient form of transport was needed between key centres linking Abyssinia and Kenya, including Meru, Marsabit, and Moyale. According to the Governor:

It is hoped to construct a road from Meru to Marsabit suitable for wheeled transport, which will greatly facilitate communications. It is also proposed to open trade routes between Kismayu, Afmadu, Wajheir, and Moyale; between Moyale, Eil Wak, and Serenli; and possibly between Wajheir and Meru; while the route between Moyale, Marsabit, and Nairobi is already proving of great advantage to Abyssinian traders. (East Africa Protectorate 1912:55)

The importance of improving transport infrastructure in the NFD, including developing transnational linkages, was reiterated in subsequent annual reports. The Governor and the NFD administrative officials also debated how to go about securing funds for this task in personal correspondence. By the 1950s, during discussions about a railway extension towards central Kenya, it was even proposed that the railway be extended all the way to Ethiopia for strategic purposes.

At other points in time, references to improving transport infrastructure in the NFD were linked to the domestic and cross-border livestock trade. Geoffrey Archer, a colonial administrator posted in the NFD, was supportive of opening up livestock trade routes between southern Abyssinia and Nairobi. In 1913, Archer reported that 7000 head of cattle had been sent from Ethiopia to Nairobi via Moyale that year. This led the Governor to state that “the establishment of a cattle trade with Abyssinia has developed in a remarkable manner, and there is every prospect that it will continue to grow” (East Africa Protectorate 1913:59). However, because the NFD was viewed as a source of cattle disease by white ranchers, the region was regularly placed under quarantine. As a result, the colonial administration ultimately spent more time enforcing livestock quarantine in the NFD than facilitating trade.

A secondary motivation for improving transport infrastructure across the NFD was to grow the region’s hunting and tourism sectors. It was initially hoped that improving the road between Nairobi and Marsabit would attract European and North American hunters to Marsabit’s designated game reserve, then called the “Northern Game Reserve”, and so generate revenue to support the administration of the northern districts. As outlined in the annual report on the East Africa Protectorate for the year 1910–1911:

A great deal of the Northern Game Reserve is extremely arid waterless country, forming a natural stronghold for species which are adapted to such conditions, but not a sanctuary for a large variety. Elephants are numerous, and so are rhinoceroses, and a number of Greater Kudu are reported ... As transport improves this shooting ground

will very much increase in value as there is a large variety of game. (East Africa Protectorate 1911:57)

Administrative correspondence during the early 1900s boasted about the abundance of wildlife in the NFD, even describing the growing black rhinoceros population as a “nuisance” (East Africa Protectorate 1911). As big game hunting grew more contentious, the Northern Game Reserve on Mount Marsabit was promoted for photographic instead of hunting safaris. Processes of removing and excluding pastoralists from the mountain began and, over the following decades, more and more restrictions were placed on natural resource use on Mount Marsabit. In 1948, the Northern Game Reserve was proclaimed Kenya’s first national park and significant efforts were undertaken to attract tourists to the freshly minted “Marsabit National Park”, including the construction of new tourist lodging facilities (Matheka 2005). Yet, like efforts to grow the livestock trade, attempts to attract tourists to the NFD were mostly unsuccessful (see Matheka 2005).

As the livestock and tourism sectors grew slowly, small urban centres emerged along key northern trade routes. Measures were taken to encourage the sedentarisation of pastoralists along these routes. Additionally, the colonial administration offered incentives for traders of Arab or Indian descent to settle key centres across the NFD, hoping this would stimulate demand for consumer goods and direct northern populations to wage labour (Waweru 2001). As one administrator argued, “shops and traders should be encouraged. They are more civilising in their effect on natives than the mere marching of platoons of soldiery about the District” (O/C, Samburu District to CO, 5<sup>th</sup> KAR, 1 November 1921, KNA/DC/SAM/1/1). Many of these nascent urban centres grew in importance during forced villagisation processes after Kenya’s independence and have since been redesignated as strategic growth nodes through *Vision 2030*.

## ***Bridging Eras of Infrastructure-Led Development in Northern Kenya***

In the years immediately after Kenya’s independence in 1963, efforts to maintain order in the NFD were challenged as a Somali secessionist movement gained momentum. Many across the north fought for the right to unify with Somalia rather than Kenya, leading to the *Shifita* War in the 1960s. Kenya’s newly independent government sought to gain control of the region by increasing its security presence and restricting movement: Between 50% and 80% of the total population of the NFD was settled in strategic villages, enclosed by barbed wire and thorn-bush fences (Dahl 1979:202; Whittaker 2012). At the same time, the government effectively starved northern Kenya of resources in favour of developing so-called high-potential agricultural areas under its new development policy, *Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya* (Odhiambo 2013). Combined, these measures had lasting “... implications for the operation of the pastoral economy ... and initiated a process of long-term sedentarisation due to impoverishment and livestock loss” (Whittaker 2012:357).

Between independence and the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, minor investments were made in infrastructure in northern Kenya. Certain roads were upgraded from sand to murram or murram to tarmac in “the maintenance of law and order” (RoK 1968) and to “win the loyalty of inhabitants” (RoK 1972:8). The government also made minor investments in gateway towns as part of its evolving urban policy (see Evans 1989). Gateway towns were seen as important links between northern areas of the country and better developed markets elsewhere (RoK 1969:50). The government also believed that facilitating trade through these centres and along key trading routes would serve as an “economic/physiological weapon” against a renewed *shifita* campaign (RoK 1972:8). However, investment in the north remained limited and delegated to under-resourced district authorities. The government body tasked with managing the development of the north during this period was called the “Ministry of Reclamation and Development of Arid, Semi-Arid Areas and Wastelands” (emphasis added), reflecting the space the north occupied in Kenya’s national imaginary.

The idea of wastelands features prominently in historical writing on northern Kenya. Like the post-independence government, the East African Protectorate is often seen to have treated the NFD as a “wasteland”—a buffer zone between the productive, white-settled highlands of central Kenya and “hostile” neighbours to the north and east. Yet, the evidence presented above suggests that certain colonial administrators saw potential in the NFD. They envisioned fostering national development through this region by attracting tourists, growing the livestock trade, and settling urban centres. Nevertheless, their ambitions were thwarted by poor connectivity, livestock disease, and insecurity and government intervention in northern Kenya slowed in the independence era. Today, there is a resurgence of interest in “unlocking” the potential of Kenya’s arid and semi-arid lands through *Vision 2030* and its flagship project, LAPSSSET (GoK 2017). Although the infrastructure being developed to unlock this potential might appear modern and new, the pathways through which national development is being pursued mirror colonial ambitions and logics.

## National Development through Infrastructure in Central Tanzania

### *Present-Day Infrastructure-Led Development*

Much like Kenya’s *Vision 2030*, Tanzania’s *Development Vision 2025* outlines the government’s strategy for transforming Tanzania into a strong and competitive middle-income country by 2025. *Vision 2025* is also being implemented through a series of successive five-year plans. The current plan, entitled *Nurturing Industrialisation for Economic Transformation and Human Development*, emphasises the creation of policy and regulatory frameworks conducive to trade-induced industrialisation. It also pinpoints key flagship infrastructure projects to drive industrialisation.

The Central Corridor (Figure 1) is key to achieving Tanzania’s *Development Vision 2025*. Once complete, the corridor will support the establishment and growth of several different industries. The Central Corridor also links the

landlocked countries of Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)—along with Tanzania’s hinterlands—to the Port of Dar es Salaam on the Indian Ocean. It is a multi-modal transport route, consisting of five components: port facilities, inland waterways, roads, railways, and one-stop border crossings. The Government of Tanzania confidently states that the Central Corridor is the “obvious aorta of [the] East African economic zone and crucial for integration of the region” (RoT 2011)—placing the corridor in competition with LAPSET in Kenya to become the leading logistics and transport hub in the region.

The Central Corridor was established in 2006, but progress was stalled by a lack of investment. Recent investment in the Central Corridor is attributable to two key developments. First, new mining investments in the Great Lakes region have created demand for more efficient transport infrastructure for the export of bulk commodities. Second, the Central Corridor was boosted when Uganda decided to export crude oil through Tanzania rather than Kenya. Initial plans for the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) suggest that it will follow the Central Corridor route through Uganda and across Tanzania. With a US \$3.5 billion investment in the EACOP, portions of the Central Corridor that were previously seen as low priority or not economically viable have been prioritised.

A key objective of the Central Corridor is to expand Tanzania’s participation and leadership role in global value chains and production networks. The Central Corridor aims to enable Tanzania and Great Lakes countries to “unlock” the potential of underexploited energy and mineral resources. Although Tanzania intends to strengthen its role in oil and gas value chains by building pipeline infrastructure along the Central Corridor, the corridor has also been presented as a means of growing other industries, such as agriculture, fishing, and tourism. If extractive, agricultural, fishing, and tourism investments along the corridor unfold as planned, transit demand through the Port of Dar es Salaam is projected to grow from five million to 14.87 million tons between 2015 and 2030—translating into billions of dollars of government revenue (World Bank 2017). The government argues that reducing transit costs in central Tanzania will make the region a more desirable place to invest in industries of all sorts. This is promised to have trickle-down effects that spur further economic development and yield desirable human development outcomes along the corridor (RoT 2016).

Smallholder farming and husbandry are the dominant livelihoods along the Central Corridor, and parts of the corridor pass through areas with relatively high levels of poverty. The Tanzanian government’s plan for addressing poverty is premised on the belief that “industrial transformation goes hand in hand with efforts to create decent employment, reduce income poverty and improve human well-being” (RoT 2016:18). The government is directing agricultural investments along the Central Corridor towards six key commodities: beef, poultry, rice, grapes, maize, and sunflowers (RoT 2011). Attracting investment to intensify the production of these commodities is promised to create new opportunities for contract farming, wage labour, and local/small businesses. In addition to creating new employment and business opportunities, it is said that new investments will drive rural industrialisation and foster productivity gains, as new technologies and

energy infrastructure become available in previously disconnected parts of Tanzania (RoT 2011).

Through the Central Corridor, Tanzania seeks to “kick start a dynamic process of agriculture-led and resource-based industrialization” in pursuit of an “export-led growth strategy” that exploits the country’s geography (RoT 2011). As part of this strategy, the government aims to ensure that its territory is organised around export-oriented production and trade. Because this reflects earlier approaches to spatial planning and development, the government does not have to start anew in its territorial design. Rather, historical ideas about how best to organise its territory and the surrounding region are simply being updated and existing infrastructure rehabilitated along many parts of the corridor.

### ***Colonial Era Infrastructure-Led Development***

The Central Corridor maps almost perfectly onto the Central Caravan route, which supported East African and Zanzibari trade during the 1800s. The explosive growth in demand for ivory in Europe, India, and North America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century—coupled with demand for slaves—drove Arabic and Indian traders to Africa’s Great Lakes region. By some estimates, up to 100,000 people travelled along the Central Caravan each year by the time of German colonisation during the 1880s (Iliffe 1979). Thus, central Tanzania has a long history of facilitating flows of commodities and people in and out of the region.

German rule in Tanzania owed much to a chartered company, called Deutsche-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft (DOAG). In working to gain control over exports in the region, such as ivory and rubber, the DOAG made use of the existing Central Caravan route while the slave trade continued initially unabated alongside its trading activities (Mapunda 2017). In addition to trade, the DOAG saw economic potential in growing the region’s cash crop economy. It established plantations during the late 1800s and plantation agriculture spread quickly across the most fertile and accessible regions of the colony (Maddox 1998). By the time the DOAG was sold to the German government at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tanzania’s economy was neatly organised around the export of a few key agricultural commodities.

The German approach was to exploit agricultural potential unique to different parts of Tanzania, encouraging the development of plantations best suited to the climate and ecology of particular regions. Coffee plantations were established in the mountain regions of northeastern Tanzania; sisal and rubber production expanded as new plantations were established in central Tanzania; and new varieties of cotton and tobacco were introduced through smallholder schemes across western Tanzania to increase the productivity of these crops (Iliffe 1979). According to Maddox (1998), the Germans organised the colony by creating distinct export-producing regions, which tended to be better integrated into the global economy than they were with each other.

As the production of agricultural commodities expanded, caravan and water transport quickly became insufficient for moving the mass quantity of agricultural goods being produced and the inputs needed for their production (Maddox

1998). Construction of a railway line from the coast towards plantation areas in the north was slowly progressing, but agricultural exports from the Great Lakes region were still carried by porters. It was not until the *Maji Maji* Rebellion—an armed rebellion against German rule that started around 1905—that construction on a central railway line towards the Great Lakes region began. This line served multiple purposes:

... by the completion ... of the railway from the coast at Dar-es-Salaam to Lake Tanganyika an important advance was made, not only in the project to capture the trade of Central Africa, but towards the economic development of the colony itself. This railway has proved very useful in the military operations, as it vastly facilitates the transport of troops to and from the western frontier of the colony. (Cana 1916:298)

Construction on the Central Line began in 1905 and was completed by 1914. The railway line followed the Central Caravan from Dar es Salaam through central Tanzania to Kigoma on the eastern shores of Lake Tanganyika. Importantly, this railway line contributed to reorganising territory within the colony, as "Tanga and Dar es Salaam became the major economic centers of the colony, replacing Bagamoyo, Kilwa, and Pangani, which had handled the bulk of the territory's exports" (Maddox 1998:450).

Once the Central Line was operational, it solidified the Germans' approach to regional development and planning, in which different parts of the country specialised in producing different commodities for export. As Iliffe (1979:314) writes:

Each region along the central railway supplied its speciality. Kigoma sent *dagaa*, the sun-dried whitebait from Lake Tanganyika which had reached the coast since the nineteenth century. Uvinza supplied salt, Tabora produced groundnuts, Ugogo sent cattle, Usagara and Ukutu were renowned for tobacco, Uluguru had been the capital's main source of vegetables since the railway reached it in German times ... [Dar es Salaam] never dominated Tanganyika's economy as Nairobi dominated Kenya's. Instead Tanganyika had a polycentric economy, with each export-producing region acting as a focus of exchange.

This makes the Central Line somewhat unique in comparison to other colonial-era railway projects: While much colonial infrastructure was built to transport goods between key sites of production to ports, the Central Line supported multiple production networks that were oriented towards different global and urban end markets. For example, while vegetables coming from Uluguru by rail were largely consumed in Dar es Salaam, tobacco and cotton travelled along the same railway line from western Tanzania to Dar es Salaam, where they were exported to international markets (Iliffe 1979).

During construction of the Central Line, labour migrants worked on the railway but typically returned home during the rainy season to tend to their fields (Sunseri 1998). While some women participated in wage labour during construction, most remained behind with children and engaged in subsistence agriculture (Sunseri 1998). As a result, the Central Line did not drive rapid urbanisation in inland Tanzania (Iliffe 1979). Instead, measures were taken to "anchor peasants to their home district, increase cash crop production, and expand the regional cattle



economy by beating back the forests to control tsetse infestations" (Sunseri 1998:577). When construction on the line finished and the need for labour declined, the colonial administration actively sought to curtail rural–urban migration (Sunseri 1998).

After World War I, the British acquired control over Tanzania and the approach to ruling the territory changed (Coulson 2015). The British discouraged industrialisation in favour of focusing on growing agricultural production in Tanzania while pushing ahead with industrialisation in Kenya (Coulson 2013). In many ways, Tanzania became subservient to the needs of Kenya during this era (Yaffey 1970). As industrial development stagnated, so to did new investment in transport infrastructure, which significantly constrained the expansion of agricultural commodity production (Rizzo 2006). When new investments in infrastructure were made during this period, they were done with the intention of better integrating Tanzania with the rest of the East Africa Protectorate (Maddox 1998).

### ***Bridging Eras of Infrastructure-Led Development in Central Tanzania***

During the years immediately following Tanzania's independence in 1961, national development planning was heavily influenced by President Nyerere's concept of *ujamaa*, defined by principles of socialism, self-reliance, and familyhood (Malima 1979). In urban areas, an attempt was made to balance regional development by deflecting growth away from Dar es Salaam towards other designated "growth centers" through which industrial development could be channelled (Roe 1970). Banks and large industries were nationalised and priority was given to new transport infrastructure in the south. China provided an interest-free loan to construct a new railway connecting Tanzania to Zambia and the United States and World Bank financed a tarmac road along the same route.

In rural areas, *ujamaa* was implemented through villagisation—compulsory living in villages enforced by the state—and the establishment of agricultural cooperatives (Coulson 2013). In determining village location, "the one and almost only factor given consideration was the availability of infrastructure, and ... proximity to the main road networks" (Shao 1986:234). Accordingly, villages were settled and cooperatives were established along the Central Line during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Given the fertility of the soil and rainfall levels along parts of this line, many cooperatives did quite well for a period of time. For example, Boesen and Mohele (1979) have written about the success of tobacco cooperatives in the Tabora Region, who made use of both the Central Line and old German roads to transport inputs and exports globally. In this sense, existing transport infrastructure routes continued to facilitate the spatial integration of central Tanzania's agricultural areas into the global economy while disarticulating these same areas from the rest of the country after independence (Slater 1977:11).

The export-oriented economy of Central Tanzania originated well before colonisation, but was reinforced through German and British rule. As "modern" transport infrastructure was built to move colonial commodities, porters and wagons were replaced with locomotives and automobiles (Maddox 1998). Nevertheless,

existing spatial patterns of infrastructure, production, and trade were solidified through villagisation and cooperatisation during the independence era. Today, as new infrastructure projects within the Central Corridor unfold, this territory is being made once again accessible to global markets and functional for investors. Infrastructure is being modernised and extended, but the spatial visions and territorial plans for the Central Corridor reflect centuries-old aspirations for people, commodities, and capital to flow through this space with ease towards global markets.

## The “Colonial Moorings” of Infrastructure-Led Development

Colonial administrations in East Africa prioritised infrastructure development to make the extraction, production, and movement of commodities through their territories more efficient. This infrastructure supported the circulation of capital for the dual purposes of empire- and profit-making, enabling European powers to exploit the full economic potential of their subjects and territories. Today, governments in East Africa—supported by emergent foreign powers, such as China—are once again pursuing sweeping infrastructure programmes that serve similar purposes. These new mega-infrastructure projects overlay their colonial antecedents spatially. The spatial visions and territorial plans of present-day governments also reflect colonial strategies for making territories accessible, useful, and visible within global production and trade networks. In this sense, infrastructure development in the colonial and post-independence eras alike is associated with the organisation of space to facilitate the extraversion of East African economies.

At the same time, today’s mega-infrastructure projects depart from the past in certain ways. Perhaps the most visible differences are the new modes of infrastructure being constructed along pre-existing infrastructure routes, such as fibre-optic cables, and “more modern” forms of infrastructure replacing the old, such as SGR. These infrastructure upgrades are meant to speed up circulation and diminish distance, cheapening the movement of commodities and accelerating production (Danyluk 2017). Another difference is the so-called greening of global infrastructure networks, such as the construction of renewable energy transmission lines within the LAPSET Corridor. Massive coordinated investment in green infrastructure are promised to enable capital and commodities to move speedily with ease despite the uncertainties created by climate change. As Wiig and Silver (2019) write, new global infrastructures have been positioned as *the* answer to the risk and disruption created by a turbulent global economy and an uncertain future.

Yet, Cresswell (2010:29) cautions that there is a temptation to think of a more “mobile world as something that replaces a world of fixities” and urges those studying infrastructure to “consider the politics of obduracy, fixity, and friction” amidst claims of seamless connectivity. In this section, we show how focusing on the *longue durée* of East Africa’s infrastructure development is useful for uncovering “permanences in place” along infrastructure routes. In other words, historicising infrastructure projects offers useful insights into how pre-colonial, colonial,

and post-independence transport routes have always made possible some flows of information, materials, and people while slowing or halting flows for others (Enns 2018). We are particularly interested in how points of immobility or mooring “tether” new mega-infrastructure corridors to the past.

In northern Kenya, the securitisation of human lives along key transport routes across time has resulted in fixity for pastoralists. In some ways, today’s efforts to secure circulation along LAPSET reflect strategies used to manage the region when the NFD was administered as a “closed” district under the colonial administration and in the years following the *Shiftya* War under the newly independent administration. As in the past, incidences of banditry and conflict continue to be met by security operations that attempt to fix people in place. Checkpoints are set-up along key routes to restrict the movement of residents. When insecurity is high, even children, youth, and teachers may be stopped from traveling through checkpoints to school. At the same time, certain types of people and goods continue to flow through the corridor with ease: Police wave through lorries carrying *miraa* for export, coaches coming from Ethiopia, 4x4s carrying tourists, and military vehicles carrying armed forces. This illustrates how perceived threats to the smooth, efficient circulation of desirable people, commodities, and capital are rendered immobile.

The securitisation of non-human life along key transport routes in northern Kenya is another enduring trend. In the past, fear of cattle disease resulted in repeated quarantines in the NFD and prevented the expansion of the northern livestock sector. These fears continue to limit the mobility of pastoralists and their livestock today. Even as LAPSET is promised to increase livestock production across northern Kenya, livestock are regularly placed under quarantine. For example, following a recent outbreak of Rift Valley Fever in 2018, a ban was placed on the slaughter, sale, and movement of livestock in and out of the region for nearly two months. Both historically and in the present, new transport infrastructure has served to secure movement through the region for some by enabling authorities to control the movement of others—in this case, pastoralists and their livestock.

Points of immobility and mooring along key infrastructure routes in central Tanzania also exist. Along the Central Corridor, smallholder farmers often remain stuck in place because of how they have come to be positioned within value chains over time rather than because of physical barriers. Tanzania’s colonial administrations dictated where and when labour moved along key transport routes to ensure a large enough workforce to support colonial plantations and outgrower schemes (Sunseri 1998). Following a period of relative empowerment for smallholder farmers during the independence era, the country is experiencing a resurgence of agricultural schemes that mimic agricultural systems in the past. In line with the government’s goal of transforming its “low productivity agricultural economy to a semi-industrialized one” (RoT 2011), contract farming and outgrower schemes are being widely promoted. These schemes risk fixing smallholders at the bottom of value chains.

For example, along the Central Corridor, many smallholders grow sunflower seeds for purchase by private enterprises that transform the seeds into edible oil. While some smallholders along completed segments of a new road between

Dodoma and Tabora noticed more buyers coming through their villages more frequently than before, they remain dependent on these buyers for links to processors and markets. Moreover, transport costs along the new road remain high, meaning smallholders often have to wait for buyers to come to them. This reveals how transport infrastructure in central Tanzania enables some actors and goods to flow through space with greater ease than others.

Settlement patterns offer another example of how immobility or mooring along both mega-infrastructure corridors reflects continuity with the past. In Kenya, a goal of *Vision 2030* and intended by-product of LAPSET is urbanisation along the corridor route. Six urban centres along LAPSET have been identified as growth poles (GoK 2015). The government plans to invest infrastructural developments in these towns to drive their growth and attract investment. These centres are also meant to absorb populations from rural areas once opportunities for formal employment are created (GoK 2015:112). At the same time, pastoralists are being advised to prepare for an expanded livestock market by minimising their herds and adopting “modern ways of farming” (Rwamba 2019). Such prescriptions align with previous administrations’ attempts to modernise and sedentarise pastoralists in northern Kenya (see Fratkin and Roth 2005). Thus, the emphasis placed on urbanisation and formal employment today represents the continuation of earlier efforts to fix pastoralists in space and to make their livelihoods more amenable to the global economy.

Comparatively, the Tanzanian government is placing less emphasis on promoting urbanisation in *Vision 2025* and its flagship projects, like the Central Corridor. Instead, the government hopes to maintain sufficient labour along new corridor routes to ensure agro-industrial growth in rural areas. As Tanzania’s Second Five Year Development Plan explains, disparities between urban and rural areas will be addressed through rural industrialisation, as smallholder farmers are linked to large-scale enterprises and availed opportunities to supply inputs and labour to industry (RoT 2016). The plan also states that steps will be taken to prevent rural–urban migration (RoT 2016). The goal of maintaining and mainstreaming rural economies through projects like the Central Corridor reflects continuity with earlier administrations’ ideas about rural development.

Ultimately, how people experience transport infrastructure—both historically and in the present—depends on who individuals are and how they are situated in relation to the wider political economy and spatial vision for a region. Transport infrastructure is not intended to enable all flows of capital, commodities, and people through space with the same fluidity. Rather, it is primarily designed to meet the needs of global capital. Furthermore, patterns of mobility and immobility set in motion during the colonial scramble for Africa continue to “create impassable chokepoints” that “make circulation improbable or even impossible” for many today (Cowen 2014:94, 115). This is true despite claims that East Africa is inevitably moving towards seamless, inclusive connectivity. By shifting our gaze to fixity rather than simply flow, we make visible additional ways that new infrastructure projects carry the colonial past into the present, sustaining colonial and racial capitalist systems in the process while stifling other ways of being and moving through space.

## Differentiated Political Reactions to Infrastructure-Led Development

The analysis presented above about the colonality of East Africa's new transport infrastructure raises questions about what the region's latest infrastructure scramble means for peasants and indigenous peoples. In this final section, we consider how those subjected to new mega-infrastructure projects are reacting and mobilising in response. Specifically, we draw attention to differences in reactions to LAPSET and the Central Corridor, arguing that varied political reactions to mega-infrastructure projects in these two contexts can be attributed in part to different collective memories of empire-building during the colonial era and state-building after independence.

As with any mega-infrastructure project, reactions to LAPSET are diverse. LAPSET is meant to enable flows of commodities, goods, and people moving in the "right" direction using "modern" modes of transportation, like SGR. It therefore presents certain people with the possibility that their livelihoods could be improved through enhanced connectivity to global markets. Yet, many of the transhumance pastoralists who live along the corridor express anxiety about the adverse impacts that LAPSET is having on their ways of life. The everyday mobilities that sustain them and their livestock are being disrupted by new transport infrastructure. As one elder from a pastoralist community along the new LAPSET highway explained: "There is a high and fast flow of vehicles on the road now ... The road is killing everything. Nothing is spared: not wildlife, children, livestock or the elderly" (Interview, Isiolo-Moyale Highway, March 2018).

With the development of LAPSET, ways of organising and moving through space that sustain pastoralists and their livestock are being interrupted, restricted, and more closely regulated. In response, acts of resistance by pastoralists and other indigenous groups are increasingly common, including road blockades, protest marches, labour strikes, and lawsuits. Through these acts of resistance, indigenous peoples are demanding that their mobilities, economies, socialities—and the ecologies in which they are embedded—be protected and that fair compensation be provided for disruptions or losses. Their movements are supported by national and transnational alliances of civil society organisations; their struggles are receiving media attention; and, in some cases, their court victories are influencing development plans. For example, in 2018 the High Court of Kenya ordered the government to pay 1.76 billion Kenyan shillings (roughly 17.4 million US dollars) in compensation to fishing communities affected by construction on the Lamu Port and to devise a management plan in consultation with the community to protect and preserve their land as the development of LAPSET progresses.

Thus far, peasant communities along the Central Corridor have not reacted in the same ways or to the same extent. Many smallholder farmers along the corridor are equally concerned about how the expansion of transport infrastructure and the growth of agro-industries will impact their access to land and natural resources. Land acquisition processes have largely unfolded without their consultation and with little or no compensation for losses; wage labour opportunities during the construction of new transport infrastructure involved poor conditions and low pay; and new infrastructure is associated with environmental degradation

and deforestation. Yet, these events have met with very little organised, overt resistance. Rather, many smallholders are “holding out”, believing their livelihood ambitions align with long-term development plans for the Central Corridor. They hope that one day they will be able to supplement their existing agricultural activities with new wage labour opportunities in the agro-industrial sector or grow their own agricultural ventures using more efficient modes of transportation. During conversations with farmers along this route, some spoke with anticipation about a future in which they envisioned themselves loading produce into train cars to prevent it from spoiling on long journeys to Dar es Salaam or other distant urban centres.

We suggest that different reactions to LAPSET and the Central Corridor are shaped in part by the legacies of previous iterations of national development and spatial planning. In Tanzania, smallholder farmers appear willing to believe that there will continue to be space for their livelihoods and ways of life in the future, as peasant labour has always been central to the government’s development plans—as illustrated by the Arusha Declaration (Huizer 1973) and more recently *Kilimo Kwanza* (“Agriculture First”) (Mbunda 2016). Although peasant labour has often been exploited and controlled with a heavy-hand in Tanzania, it has long been recognised as a cornerstone of national development (see Huizer 1973). During conversations with smallholders along the Central Corridor, it was also suggested that meanings attached to collective memories of *ujamaa* encourage smallholders to comply with projects being implemented to serve public interests.

In contrast, the violent exclusion enforced in Kenya’s NFD during the colonial era was followed by further exclusion through the dehumanising experience of forced villagisation after independence. Collective memories of these historical processes continue to shape how pastoralists in northern Kenya understand their identity and position in relation to the modern state today. Many see the state as a powerful and even foreign entity that exists to control and punish rather than to sustain and include. Although new transport infrastructure has improved connectivity across the north of Kenya in ways that could benefit pastoralists, there lingers a readiness to challenge or resist those aspects of infrastructure development that threaten people’s everyday mobilities, economies, and socialities. In this regard, political reactions to new mega-infrastructure projects are themselves “moored” to the past as collective memories continue to shape people’s identities and their senses of loyalty or disloyalty to the modern state and its spatial visions for the future.

## Conclusion

East Africa is experiencing record levels of investment in mega-infrastructure development, which is promised to catalyse further investment along transport routes and contribute to widespread socio-economic development in “disconnected” and “unproductive” areas. Despite promises that infrastructure development will deliver more modern, prosperous futures for all, new mega-infrastructure projects share remarkable similarities with those of the colonial era. In this article, we show how the spatial visions and territorial plans of colonial



administrators are reappearing in those associated with new mega-infrastructure corridors today, focusing on LAPSET in Kenya and the Central Corridor in Tanzania. Tracing these two new mega-infrastructure corridors across space and time unearths historical antecedents that continue to shape their aspirations and designs, revealing the coloniality of East Africa's latest infrastructure agenda. In this regard, our analysis contributes to a nascent debate in literature on the "infrastructure turn" by demonstrating that the current resurgence of state-led territorial design in East Africa owes just as much to spatial visions and territorial logics of early colonial administrators as it does to national development and spatial planning initiatives in the independence era.

Furthermore, this article emphasises the importance of considering the *longue durée* of infrastructure-led development. Engaging with long-term history reveals that new mega-infrastructure projects carry with them ambitions from the colonial past and therefore materialise in ways that continue to serve the interests of global capital over those of peasants and indigenous peoples. As Braudel (2009:178) writes, certain structures "encumber history and restrict it, and hence control its flow. Other structures crumble more quickly. But all structures are simultaneously pillars and obstacles. As obstacles they provide limitations ... from which man [sic] and his [sic] experiences cannot liberate themselves". Along these lines, our final discussion of "colonial moorings" highlights how new infrastructure—along with the logics, meanings, and politics that inevitably get built-in to infrastructure—functions like other structures in society to encumber history and restrict change.

To conclude, our discussion in this article points to the need for more attention to the coloniality of new mega-infrastructure projects in East Africa, as well as other parts of the world. In particular, we see a need to better historicise the role of so-called emerging powers in East Africa's contemporary infrastructure scramble. It is well known that China is funding and building extraordinary amounts of infrastructure across Africa: Understanding whether Chinese-financed infrastructure projects are fundamentally changing spatial visioning for the region or instead bringing to fruition ambitions of the colonial past is worthy of investigation, as is questioning whether Chinese investment in Africa's infrastructure aligns or departs from previous eras of south-south solidarity. The role of other emerging powers in driving infrastructure-led development across the continent also deserves more attention—including often-overlooked actors like South Africa or Turkey. However people might choose to advance this research agenda, our analysis reveals that focus on the *longue durée* is vital to understanding the emancipatory potential and limits of infrastructure-led development.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> “Coloniality” refers to “longstanding patterns of power that ... continue to define culture, labour, intersubjective relations and knowledge production, long after the end of direct colonialism” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:16). The concept articulates “continuities of colonial mentalities, psychologies and worldviews” into the “postcolonial neocolonised” world where coloniality shapes people’s everyday lives (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:8, 7) (see also Mamdani 1996; Mbembe 2001; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 1986).

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